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Carolyn I. Pokowy, JD

April 4, 2005

Senator Bill Nelson

716 Hart Senate Office Building

2<sup>nd</sup> & C Sts., NE

Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Nelson:

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is pleased to provide support to the *Advance Directives Improvement and Education Act of 2005 (S347 IS)*, in which Medicare recipients can consult with their physician on end of life and advance care planning issues to become informed about potential decisions a person or a person's family member may face in life threatening situations. This legislation would allow physicians to be reimbursed for a medical visit to discuss end of life care issues with patients and family members. Further, a public education campaign is planned through the Department of Health and Human Services to educate all citizens about the importance of advance directives such as living wills.

NASW supports this bill as an important tool for all Americans to consider, communicate, and document their advance care planning wishes in regard to end of life situations and quality of life indicators for devastating illness or injury, from which there is little or no hope of recovery. Social workers practice, along with other professionals, in the delivery of services to individuals and their loved ones affected by catastrophic illness and injury, in which life and death decisions are presented. Social workers often serve as a bridge between individuals, their loved ones, and other professionals in exploring and weighing such life and death issues. Social workers are trained in the ethical and legal parameters to provide information and supportive counseling to individuals and their loved ones in such personal and difficult times.

NASW is the largest membership organization of social workers in the world with over 152,000 members, and 56 chapters in the United States and abroad. NASW affirms the right of the individual to determine the level of her or his care, including decisions an individual can make in advance of life altering circumstances that might impede a person's quality of life. NASW has developed both policy and practice standards (*NASW Standards for Social Work Practice in Palliative and End of Life Care*), which guide social workers in the field of palliative and end of life care.

Thank you for the opportunity to support such important legislation.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth J. Clark, PhD, ACSW, MPH  
Executive Director

